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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Legião da Boa Vontade, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the principle of the inadmissibility of discrimination and proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, including distinction based on sex. The Legion of Good Will (LGW), a Brazilian NGO in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) collects and shares best practices and lessons learned within the United Nations (UN) system on strategies of empowerment and advancement of women and girls to disseminate in national and international levels through several means of communications and applied at the LGW's Community and Educational Centers, Day Care Centers and primary schools in Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Argentina, Portugal and in the USA. As the journalist, radio broadcaster and writer José de Paiva Netto, President of the Legion of Good Will states: "All successful organizations have the remarkable presence of spiritually enlightened women. Intuition, the Creator's competence manifested in the creature, is one of the most powerful female instruments. Maybe that is why Voltaire (1694-1778) once had said: 'Tous les raisonnements des hommes ne valent pas un sentiment d'une femme', that is, all men's reasoning are not worth the sentiment of a woman".

For centuries women have been facing the consequences of a patriarchal society, constantly having more duties than rights — in the particular case of black women, only an exotic value has been attributed to them, either as sexual objects or as slaves or easy-to-manipulate servants. International organisms have revealed the factors of poverty and low school efficiency, i.e., personal and private risk as the front door of million of women and children in the sex market. And there are many ongoing forms of female exploitation. To raise a society conscious of its capacity of articulating its rights and duties with moral, ethnic and spiritual responsibility is a duty of each one of us, civil society, as the journalist Paiva Netto emphasizes: "On the fall of any country or civilization, the first great step to the collapse is the work for the demoralization of women. Women are the basis of nations, the support of the peoples. Through maternity, they get closer to God in such a level that we, men, will never be able to reach. (...) The woman is the soul of Humanity, the good root and the foundation of civilizations".

Since the beginning of life in society, women were considered, by the dominant classes, to be inferior to men. In many countries, they achieved the right to express their political opinion by the power of vote only on the second half of the 20th century. When Human Beings begin to understand one another with respect and dignity — that give them the worth of citizen —, they will understand the performance suitable to them in society. "Feelings of mercy, love, solidarity are", as the director of the LGW declares, "levers that will raise from the ruins (moral, social, political ruins, etc.) the Solidary Altruistic Ecumenical Society, that is not an utopia, nor an ideology. It is a proposal that lives the exercise of transnational fraternity, without racial, gender, religion borders or any other kind. In the Solidary Altruistic Ecumenical Society the individual understands that the body is much more than matter. It is the vehicle for the transforming actions abolishing the individualistic feelings that cooperate for the degeneration of collective groups".

The Legion of Good Will brings to the 50th Commission on the Status of Women its cooperation for the absolute fulfillment of Beijing Platform of Action, working to facilitate partnership between men and women in all sections, wherever it is politically, culturally, scientifically or socially. Following Paiva Netto's dialect, the Legion of Good Will reinforces the important role of women in the social arena. (...) "Women have the right to become President of a country, a religious leader, a CEO, a captain of an aircraft and transatlantic ships; she has the right to become a doctor, an engineer, a teacher... At work, there is a fair concept of value among men and women: that of competence. So the genders here are harmonized. May the man shine, may the woman shine, according to each one's competence. This does not mean that men and women are completely equal. The anatomy itself denies this fact. What I would like to say is that we should not support old barriers and raise new ones, firmed on taboos, prejudice and spurious interests to hinder greater influence of the woman on the destiny of the world. Men and Women depend on one another. They complete themselves". (Paiva Netto, extracted from the book *Reflections and Thoughts — Dialect of Good Will*, published in 1987).

In the beginning of this millennium we see a growing movement of the fight against discrimination of women by the international community. The fulfillment of the UN Charter added to the efforts of the people and organizations spread throughout the world, world governments have implemented policies of promotion of respect and human rights and to the fundamental freedoms, without discrimination of race, gender, language, religion or color.

By this solidary and ecumenical way, LGW fosters several socio-educational programs and projects that promote the valorization of women and children in personal and social risk situations. More than four million assistances a year are made through its Community and Educational Centers. Women are motivated to develop themselves as a whole, taking the development to the context of their families by means of actions in the areas of maternal health, nutrition, education and training courses, besides offering psychological, juridical and social support. According to the data collected by a research held in 2005 by *Toledo & Associados*, women represent 86% of the assistance made annually by the LGW. Being the woman the core of the family, the investment directed towards her becomes the most efficient way of transforming society.

From the main programs *Woman BEING* stands out, going back to the rescue of human, professional intellectual and emotional self-esteem of women, pregnant or not. The betterment of the quality of life is looked for in many different ways. Educational lectures, workshops and occupational training courses that aim at increasing the family income and the re-insertion into labor market. Juridical and psychological support, made by voluntary professionals, guarantee the guidance to problems generated by many different levels of vulnerability. Groups of experience work for the awareness of the importance of family planning; prenatal care; of affection between mother and child; of knowledge and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, cervical and breast cancer; among other topics. In the project "Baby-citizen", the pregnant women receive care during all stages of pregnancy. Complementary nutrition, speaking and music therapy, basic hygiene care, besides orientation on breastfeeding and baby health, are some of the actions developed until the children surpass the most risky period of mortality, i.e., reaches the first year of age.

Other initiatives to guarantee that the rights of women are being respected are day care centers and schools of the Legion of Good Will, that prepare children to reach their full potential of development and exercise the citizenship. From nursery to high school, the LGW applies a qualified differentiated methodology, which promotes the spiritual-bio-psychosocial progress of the students. Besides the most advanced techniques of education, the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy, proclaimed by Paiva Netto, takes to the student's universal values of Ecumenical and Solidary Spirituality. The teaching facilities of the LGW are operated under the motto "Here we study. Brain and Heart are formed", that combines intellect and feeling. This way, the Institution has gathered forces for the fulfillment of the convention that determines the elimination of all forms of discrimination towards women, enhancing the participation of the female sex in achieving gender equality among genders in all areas.

There is no way of living the equality and justice without understanding that the conducting element for the progress of the peoples is Love. The Human Being, before being a social actor, is a transforming agent; he is part of the social cell. If one of the cells gets sick, the whole cell tissue is compromised. To look for the equilibrium, as the President of the LGW states, is the bias for the comprehension of equality:

"The growing process of maturation of a People which are discovering even tardiness their rights as a citizen, considering that two hundred years have passed since the French Revolution (we are in 1991), will come to an end that no country can truly develop its talents, if it goes on existing as a big slave quarter with masters and slaves, either shutting itself as a xenophobic shell, or opening up in a temerarious way, up to the point of losing its identity, its sovereignty. People's comprehension will get mature when they are able to understand the value of citizenship in its *sensu lato*, because it is not enough to consider a citizen only in his/her physical context, but also in his/her **spiritual** context, after all, body and **Soul** form any component of human groups**.** Indeed we are originally Spirit. This is the full meaning of citizenship, which cannot admit the sole illiteracy of human letters, but the ignorance of spiritual maters as well. The lack of knowledge about the reality of the facts discussed in here increases actions which will cause hunger, unemployment, sectarianism, cold individualistic, i.e. self-worshipping idealism, the fostering of scorn towards those who are suffering in society, because wealth and poverty lie within Human Beings; to reveal them or not depends on mentality and cultural factors (which will be markedly spiritual in a near future) that have to be practiced. "(...) It is urgently necessary to change mentality, the one which enthrones crime as a model, exploitation as a goal, mistakes being apathetically faced as a 'good'

settlement of the existence, so we can achieve a fair social system, product of the decisive action of effectiveness, fraternally combative communities, and of a government that settles up firm goals for the progress of it's country and it's population. However, with no pretext whatsoever should we at any time renounce the generous help of our friends from the Supreme Spiritual World, whom many people properly call Guardian Angels. Actually what is concrete is the Spirit, which does not mean that the body, its outfit, should be criminally discharged. Older people say that 'an empty bag does not stand upright'. So let's set equilibrium as our objective." (Paiva Netto, *Somos todos Profetas* [We are all Prophets], 44th edition, São Paulo: Elevação, page 125).

As a conclusion, we bring to the participants of the 50th Commission on the Status of Women the following quote of the President of the Legion of Good Will, José de Paiva Netto, published in the magazine *BOA VONTADE Mulher* [GOOD WILL *Woman*] — special edition of the *BOA VONTADE* magazine —, page 11: "(...) The Woman's role is essential for the survival of the peoples. Sister, wife, mother, friend, worker, head of the family, she is an indispensable presence and loving counselor. For the children is her future, since she prepares future men and women. That is why the societies that depreciate them, depreciate themselves. Woman with enlightened knowledge turns the family bond strong as well as a community big, moral, respected and united."